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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: PERONIST DISSIDENT DISCUSSES
PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS AND MID-TERM ELECTION STRATEGY

Classified By: Ambassador Wayne for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In his first substantive meeting with Ambassador Wayne February 5, National Deputy and Peronist dissident Felipe Sola of the Peronist Union bloc discussed his 2011 presidential aspirations, this year's midterm elections, and the merits of a single ballot system. Sola is in the Argentine headlines these days as he, Buenos Aires City Mayor Mauricio Macri of Republican Proposal, and Buenos Aires provincial politician Francisco De Narvaez of the Light Blue and White Union bloc are considering joining forces in the province of Buenos Aires for the legislative elections in October.

¶2. (C) Sola, whose presidential ambitions have been in the news following his break from the ruling Victory Front (FpV) coalition in November 2008, said the GOA's poor handling of the farm crisis and his intimate knowledge of the agriculture sector impelled him to consider running for the presidency in ¶2011. As to this year's midterm congressional elections, Sola expressed optimism that if he, Macri, and De Narvaez backed a unified slate, they would win in Buenos Aires province. Sola said he favored changing the current multi-ballot system to a single one to prevent the fraud which he said occurred in the 2007 presidential elections and could be repeated if a new system was not implemented by this year's midterms. The meeting provided a good re-introduction to a confident, energetic, and quick-witted politician who hopes to use the midterm elections to catapult his way to the 2011 presidential race. End Summary.

Presidential Hopeful Relishes Media Spotlight

¶3. (C) In his first substantive meeting with Ambassador Wayne February 5, National Deputy and Peronist dissident Felipe Sola of the Peronist Union bloc expressed optimism about winning the midterm elections. Sola, who split from the ruling Victory Front (FpV) in November 2008, seemed to relish the recent press attention he has received over his alliance building and presidential aspirations. Responding to the Ambassador's observation that he had been headline news of late, Sola said with a laugh "the more they talk (about me), the better." (Comment: While waiting to see the Ambassador, Sola relayed to poloff that he had just completed numerous press interviews on his cell phone, noting that while he was talking to one news organization, another one would call.) Sola remarked that he felt important decisions often get buried in the onslaught of television, radio, and print news commentaries.

¶4. (C) Sola said he initially did not consider running for the presidency. However, as he watched the 2008 farm crisis unfold (referring to it as a "120-day movie"), he began to reconsider. Sola characterized the Kirchners' discourse toward the farm sector as out of touch with reality. To underscore his point, he referenced a refrain from a popular

tango song: "you look like you are wearing a costume, but it is not Carnival time." Sola claimed to understand the farm sector better than most because he has ten years of experience as a senior official on agriculture over two non-consecutive appointments, is well-acquainted with the sector's leaders, and lives in farm country.

Getting Ready for Midterms

15. (C) Sola agreed that the legislative election results in Buenos Aires province this October would be a bell weather for the country. He identified three key political forces in that legislative race: the FpV, Peronist dissidents, and the center-left Civic Coalition. Sola remarked that those who vote for the FpV slate will be voting to maintain the Kirchners in power. Responding to the Ambassador's question on who would lead the FpV ticket, Sola speculated that Cabinet Chief Sergio Massa would be the "fresh face" the FpV needed as he believed former President Nestor Kirchner (NK) "had no interest" in running.

16. (C) Sola expressed optimism that if he, Buenos Aires City Mayor Mauricio Macri of Republican Proposal, and National Deputy Francisco De Narvaez of the Light Blue and White Union bloc backed a unified legislative slate, they would win in Buenos Aires province. To illustrate, he drew a chart depicting his slate winning with 32 percent against 30 percent for the FpV ticket and 29 percent for the Civic Coalition (CC) slate headed by CC leader Margarita Stolbizer.

He claimed that Macri and former President Eduardo Duhalde are on board, but De Narvaez, whom Sola described as having seven times his wealth, has yet to be convinced. (Comment: Argentine dailies subsequently reported that De Narvaez agreed to meet Macri and Sola the week of February 9 to discuss the possibility of presenting a unified slate and the papers have been filled with speculations about the coalition. A local polling firm also released a poll showing that coalition in a virtual dead heat with the FpV if elections were held today.)

17. (C) Sola talked up his ability to capture votes since he has national recognition and a presidential image, whereas De Narvaez's prospects are limited since he is known only at the provincial level. Regarding Macri, Sola described him as a technocrat who has matured and improved immensely. He added that Macri has a good grasp of budget issues and praised Macri's efforts to adjust the City's budget to prevent the City from going into debt, thereby establishing a fairly healthy fiscal state. He also highlighted Macri's positive work with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in expanding public works projects in the City.

18. (C) Sola explained that Buenos Aires province, out of the country's 23 provinces and Buenos Aires City, is the only critical battleground in this year's election -- not because of its size, but because of the Kirchners' strength in the blue collar suburbs of the province. He noted that the province helped elect NK and remains, along with Santa Cruz province, NK's only electoral strongholds.

In Favor of a Single Ballot System

19. (C) Sola said he highly supports changing the current multi-ballot system to a single ballot, a measure that Macri has proposed for the city and which the opposition is advocating on a nationwide scale (septel). He stressed that a single ballot would prevent what he called the "fraud" that occurred during the 2007 elections when party ballots were mixed up, taken away by voters, or were unavailable at polling sites. Sola did not discount the possibility that the Kirchners could resort to fraud if they believe the FpV will lose the midterms. (Comment: Currently, Argentine voters face an overwhelming number of ballots on Election Day as each party has its own ballot. Since party ballots include an entire slate of candidates, if voters wish to vote for candidates from different parties not on the same slate,

they must tear the ballots to separate their preferred candidates. In addition, there have been reports that many poorer voters arrive at the polls with the ballot already pre-marked for them. Other voters are reportedly paid to take away paper ballots of the opposing slates when they leave the voting room where piles of ballots are left on the table. Both Minister of Justice Anibal Fernandez and Minister of Interior Florencio Randazzo have publicly described the single ballot as "impractical" in districts with numerous candidates because their names would not fit on one ballot.)

¶10. (C) Sola described the single ballot as an intermediate step, with the ultimate goal being an electronic ballot system. He said Interior Minister Randazzo, whom he described as a hard worker, understands the electronic ballot system well as he visited Brazil to learn about its electronic system when Sola was Governor of Buenos Aires province and Randazzo was Undersecretary for Modernization in the province. Sola relayed that, at the time, they successfully tested the electronic ballot system with Argentines living abroad. (Comment: Leading daily "La Nacion" reported on February 7 that Randazzo, as Undersecretary for Modernization for Buenos Aires province, had planned to implement the electronic ballot system for all parties by 2005, but his plan was rejected by the province's Peronist mayors and the NK administration.)

On Argentina's Severe Drought

¶11. (SBU) Sola expressed concern about the current high death rate among female cattle because of the drought, and predicted a high decline in beef production by 2011. Given the severity of the drought, he stressed that the GOA should cease its practice of imposing unilateral measures and engage in a serious dialogue with the farm sector.
Praise and Advice for President Obama

¶12. (SBU) In closing, Sola suggested that President Obama use the Summit of Americas to announce a new capitalization of the IDB, with a specific focus on the environment, energy, and food production projects. He said such an announcement would be well-received and cost little. He added that President Obama appears to have composed a strong cabinet and praised him for having "the right focus" by proposing to cap the salaries of top executives of companies receiving USG financial assistance. "We all need President Obama to do well," he stressed. After describing President Obama as the "anti-recession factor" for the world, he proclaimed himself to be Argentina's "anti-recession factor."

Bio Note

¶13. (C) Sola started his political career in the 1980s as Minister for Agricultural Issues in Buenos Aires province under former Governor Antonio Cafiero. Sola was politically aligned with former Presidents Carlos Menem during the 1990s and Eduardo Duhalde following Argentina's economic collapse in 2001. During the 1990s, Sola served as National Deputy and Secretary for Agriculture, Livestock, Fishing, and Food, a position he had also held in the late 1980s. From 1999 to 2001, Sola was Vice-Governor of Buenos Aires and Governor from 2003 until 2007, when the Kirchners publicly switched their support to then-Vice-President Daniel Scioli for the gubernatorial job. Sola told Ambassador Wayne that after serving as Buenos Aires Governor, NK offered him Ambassadorial posts in the United States, Germany, France, and Uruguay, but Sola turned them all down, preferring to remain in Argentina. Sola won a seat in the Chamber of Deputies in 2007 and remained in the FpV coalition until November 2008, when he left the coalition due to differences over the government's handling of the farm conflict. He now leads the dissident Peronist Union, which he formed upon leaving the FpV.

¶14. (C) Born in Alberti, Buenos Aires province, on July 23, 1950, Sola is an agricultural engineer by training, who traveled to the United States in 1989 as a USIS International Visitor Grantee. Sola said he and his common-law-wife, Maria Helena Chaves -- a well-known Argentine Polo player -- sold their apartment and moved to the country where they built a new home, which included a polo field and horse stables. He has two children from a previous marriage.

Comment

¶15. (C) The meeting provided a nice re-introduction for the Embassy to a confident, energetic, and quick-witted politician who hopes to use the midterm elections to catapult his way to the front in the 2011 presidential race. We will watch to see how he handles his first set of hurdles: convincing De Narvaez to join him and Macri, and determining who among this stable of ambitious politicians will lead their unified slate. In a land of strong personalities, we expect a lively run-up to the midterms.

WAYNE